

and an asset to the 11th District of North Carolina, and I am honored to share her award winning remarks with all of my colleagues.

"DEMOCRACY—ABOVE AND BEYOND"

(By Erin Watson—1996-97 VFW Voice of Democracy Scholarship Program)

Who in his right mind could even consider building an industrial park in the middle of our beautiful mountain valley? The county commissioners talked like it was a done deal, and it looked like the project would be railroaded through, when the question arose, what do the people of that area think? At the public hearing, citizens from all over the county spoke emotionally against it, 10 to 1. But, when the meeting ended, it appeared that the people of this valley could not be heard.

"Why should we bother to have such a meeting?" I asked my Dad. "Did anybody say anything that mattered? Who says we have such a great country?"

Many times I have wondered why my ancestors would sell all, leave family, and suffer greatly to come to America. I have imagined their joy when into view came that tall shining figure standing on the shore with her torch held high, offering warmth, safety, and freedom. It must have been this light my ancestors sought for the promise of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But on this night I wondered, why this country? What burning desire pushed them forward at all costs? And what did they see here that I was not seeing as I learned more about our democratic system?

Then I was given the chance to spend a month in the country of Russia. I really wasn't searching for answers when I moved in with Masha and her family in Rostov. But soon I could see everywhere people would give all for that precious gift of freedom. My Russian Mama and Papa warned me not to be opinionated in public. The freedom of speech I understood was not practiced nor allowed, Papa gently explained. I also discovered that the creativity of school students was very limited, and they were not taught how, but what to think. All students studied American History, and most of them knew English. I thought about the little Russian History I knew, and marveled that they would learn all they could about my country. It soon became apparent that these students harbored a hope of going to America, and prepared for that day.

As time passed, I began to long for my home in America, where I knew I was safe and free. Masha and her family hugged me tearfully as I boarded the departing train. I waved from the window as Masha ran alongside the train, calling "I will come to America." Then she was out of sight. I longed to take my Russian friends with me, fulfilling their lifelong dream.

On the trip home, I reflected on those brave people who saw and followed the light of America's democracy. I felt like my ancestors embarking on my own journey to freedom. My family laughed as I hugged the ground in my yard. How could they know of the pride and love I had for my country, and the newfound respect for her democracy? I, too would have given all to come home to America.

I have learned that to be an American is more than simply partaking of the freedoms we enjoy. It is our right and obligation to be a working part of our democracy, which is truly a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people" of America. I understand my part in keeping democracy's light burning bright, so others can enjoy these same freedoms. I know I must encourage others to show their love for America

and take an active part in our democracy, too.

And, when I have a family of my own, I will share my experiences as I teach them to respect and love their country and the principles on which she was founded. I will teach them to be proud to be governed as a free people, and to be willing to defend and serve whenever needed. I will teach them to speak out when issues affect their homes and lives. I will teach them to vote, and be active in their communities so our light may continue to shine. I will point to our beautiful valley, and recount the events that caused the county commissioners to swallow their pride and abandon the industrial park project. I will proudly explain how the voice of the people was heard in our community, and how our democratic system worked again.

At last I do understand why America is the place my ancestors turned for hope. It is the shining light of democracy, the freedom to be what each person wishes to be. It is the freedom to succeed, and be useful and needed in a society that fosters individual creativity, and allows each person his full potential. And it is the promise that the next generation can have a better life than the last, if we uphold the values and statutes that our ancestors sacrificed for and loved so dearly.

For my friend Masha and those like her around the world, we must continue to hold our democratic ideals high. We cannot bring other nations to democracy, but we can lead so that all may see and want to follow. American Democracy, like that shining statue, does stand as a light above all others, and reaches out to those far beyond its borders.

#### THE MELISSA INSTITUTE FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

HON. ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, March 10, 1997*

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment for its grassroots efforts in turning a tragic loss into something constructive for others.

Melissa Aptman was brutally murdered on May 5, 1995, just 2 weeks before she would have graduated from Washington University in St. Louis, MO. A charming and gifted young woman, she was taken from her family, friends, and society by a senseless, violent crime. Melissa grew up in Miami and was a graduate of the Dade County public schools. While in college, she worked for the school newspaper, mentored an inner-city student, participated in sorority affairs, and sat on the Panhellenic Standards Board.

Days before her death, Melissa wrote about violence against women on a college exam. "Such acts," she wrote "attempt to break the human spirit and destroy the state of mind of those involved." She added that "In spite of the brutality imposed on them women almost always find some source of strength."

Melissa's family has drawn strength from her words. They believe that we cannot let evil win. As a result, they have turned their grief into action, launching their own battle against violence and its devastating impact on victims and their families by creating the Melissa Institute in her honor.

The mission of the Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment is to bridge

the gap between expert knowledge of the nature and impact of violence and the practical application of this knowledge. Their first major conference on violence and youth will be held on May 2, 1997, in Miami, FL.

We must work together to fight evil and violence.

#### PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE CORAL REEF FISHING PRACTICES WORLDWIDE

HON. GEORGE MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, March 10, 1997*

Mr. MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, today, I am introducing a resolution expressing the sense of Congress that the United States and the United Nations should condemn fishing practices that are harmful to coral reef ecosystems and promote the development of sustainable coral reef fishing practices worldwide.

Coral reefs are vital to the environment and the economy of many island and coastal nations. They are among the most biologically diverse and productive ecosystems on Earth, rivaling the tropical rainforests on land. The hard structure of the reef is built up over thousands of years by the secretions of the tiny living coral animals. So, a coral reef is truly a living structure. And, as a living structure, thousands—perhaps millions—of individual coral animals are dying and others are taking their place on the reef at any one time.

The problem is that now human activities have shifted that balance and coral reefs are dying off at an alarming rate worldwide. Corals are very sensitive to water pollution, sedimentation, damage from boat groundings, and even simple physical contact by divers. These largely inadvertent injuries are a significant cause of the well-documented decline of coral reefs worldwide. Coral reefs are, in a sense, the canary in the coal mine of the oceans.

A great deal of injury is being inflicted on coral reefs, mainly in Southeast Asia, through easily preventable, largely illegal fishing techniques. Cyanide, other poisons, and surfactants like dishwashing liquids, are being used to stun and capture fish for the aquarium trade and for the live food fish trade. These chemicals kill nearby coral, and divers scrambling to get fish out of nooks and crannies in the reef often inflict further damage on the reef. Although illegal virtually everywhere, dynamite is still being used on some reefs to stun or kill fish. Afterwards, they float to the surface where they are easily harvested. The effect on the reef is obviously devastating. Most of the aquarium fish captured in this way end up in hobbyists' tanks in the United States. Most of the live food fish end up on plates in the homes and restaurants of Southeast Asia.

Although the State Department, NOAA, Department of the Interior, and other agencies are working, through the International Coral Reef Initiative, to identify and reduce threats to coral reefs, they need our help. These kinds of unsustainable fishing practices would not be occurring if powerful market forces were not at work. United States and Asian consumer demand for reef fish is, in part, driving the destruction of coral reefs. Yet how many aquarium hobbyists would purchase a wild-caught